

Why Submitting Good Data Notes is Important

States are expected to submit timely, complete, and accurate data to the U.S. Department of Education (ED) based on pre-determined due dates and timelines. ED also expects that states submit data according to the instructions provided in the *EDFacts* file specifications (located on the *EDFacts* Initiative Site). Data notes are required when states are unable to submit timely, complete, and/or accurate data or when states have additional information to provide about their data. Data notes are important as they create:

- 1. Improved Usage.** Data notes submitted by states provide critical contextual information that allows for improved use and interpretation of state submitted data. Providing meaningful context allows data users to interpret the data and understand the limitations of the data.
- 2. Better communication.** Data notes can address data quality issues, data anomalies identified by ED or preemptively alert ED to issues known by the state (such as data are accurately reported regardless of a data quality error). Understanding a state's situation or interpretation of its data up-front allows for more productive discussions between ED and the state *EDFacts* Coordinators, CSPR Coordinators, Assessment Directors, IDEA Data Managers, and other state personnel.
- 3. Increased efficiency.** Data notes that states provide may resolve or mitigate a data quality issue, thereby reducing the amount of follow-up required by ED. They also allow SEAs to provide explanations of substantial changes from the previous year.

Who reads data notes?

Internal program offices at ED and public *EDFacts* data users read state data notes to assess:

- if an identified data quality issue is a valid data quality concern or simply an anomaly;
- the severity of a data quality issue;
- if changes in state policy are a contributing factor for data reporting changes;
- if changes in the state's implementation of programs and services are a contributing factor for large increases or decreases in the counts and percentages reported to ED;
- if the state has plans to address issues that impact data quality, including information on next steps; and
- if ED should contact the state *EDFacts* Coordinator and relevant state staff to better understand a potential issue.

Are state data notes really available to the public?

Yes! When ED releases data files to the public, the supporting data documentation includes data notes that provide state context deemed substantive and relevant to data use and interpretation. In some cases, ED edits the data note content for length, clarity, and to remove sensitive information, such as the names of individuals. There are cases where ED will not release a data note if the information is sensitive or for internal use only and not relevant to the public use of the data files. Click the following links to view examples of data notes that are part of these public file releases.

- [Common Core of Data \(CCD\) Data](#)
- [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\) Section 618 Data](#)
- [EDFacts Assessment Achievement and Participation data](#)
- [EDFacts Adjusted-Cohort Graduation Rate \(ACGR\) data](#)

What makes a data note informative and substantive?

Informative data notes are relevant, specific, and descriptive. Data notes (1) speak explicitly to the data question raised, (2) provide specific information about data anomalies, and (3) describe next steps to address questions and anomalies. Data notes that lack specifics may lead ED and data users to misinterpret data issues. Well-crafted, effective data notes:

1. **Provide reasons for data anomalies when possible.** Affirming the data are correct as reported does not address why a data anomaly exists. Productive data notes will provide relevant information on changes that have affected the data (e.g., in measurement, collection, subgroup identification, population count, and definitions).
2. **Speak to policy changes.** If state policy has changed the way data are defined, measured, and/or collected, provide specific examples in which the policy change impacts the data submitted.
3. **Note implementation changes that could affect data.** If there have been changes in a state's implementation of programs or services that could have impacted the data, provide an explanation. .
4. **Comment on next steps.** If the state has already identified a potential data anomaly, describe the next steps to resolve this issue in future data submissions. Provide this in addition to the reason the data quality issue occurred.

Data Note Examples

The section below provides sample responses to several errors, drawn from historical responses. In each table, the first entry is a common but unusable response to the data quality error. Subsequent entries in the table show how providing supplemental details improve the quality of data notes.

Example – Assessment data change from prior year

Data Quality Concern: The FS175 total number of students who took a regular assessment with accommodations (REGASSWACC) and received a valid score in SY 2018-19 is significantly smaller than the number reported in SY 2020-21.

Type of Data Note	Data Note	Reasoning for examples	Details on examples
Unusable Data Note	The data match state records	Why is it unusable?	All data submitted to ED <i>Facts</i> should always match state records
Better	“We are reworking the system to report accommodations. This caused the difference in the counts.”	Why is this example better than the last?	Provides some information about a change in how the data were collected but is not substantive.
Best	“The state identified problems with reporting accommodations. For SY 2018-19, the state reported only accommodations for paper-based assessments. For SY 2020-21, the state was able to also report accommodations for computer-based tests.”	Why is this example better than the last?	Explains the details of the problems with reporting accommodations.

Difference in ACGR cohort count from prior year

Data Quality Concern: For FS150, the SY 2017-18 4-Year All Students graduation cohort count is higher by 10% or more than the SY 2016-17 4-Year cohort count for several subgroups. These larger differences from the previous year are more than might be expected.

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Example 4 – Difference in ACGR cohort count from prior year

Data Quality Concern: For FS150, the SY 2019-20 4-Year All Students graduation cohort count is higher by 10% or more than the SY 2018-19 4-Year cohort count for several subgroups. These larger differences from the previous year are more than might be expected.

Unusable Data Note	The data match SEA records. These represent fluctuations in graduation rate possibly due to the small class sizes in small districts.	Why is it unusable?	All data submitted to ED <i>Facts</i> should always match state records
Better	This increase is due, partially, to an increase in enrollment. The removal of the XXXX test from high school graduation requirements also contributed to the increase.	Why is this example better than the last?	Provides some information about a change in how the data were collected but is not substantive.

<p>Best</p>	<p>ECODIS: In 2015-16, State X introduced a new poverty measure, percentage of economically disadvantaged students. This measure (students directly certified for participation in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) via participation in federal/state income and nutrition programs (e.g., TANF, SNAP) and those categorically eligible for participation in NSLP (homeless, migrant, runaway and foster care students) resulted in a smaller economically disadvantaged subgroup compared to the previous measure (students eligible for participation in NSLP as determined by application to the program). LEP: The increase may be attributed to two factors: 1) greater efforts on the part of the department to improve accurate data reporting at the district level and 2) growth in the population of LEP students in the state.</p>	<p>Why is this example better than the last?</p>	<p>Explains the details of the problems with historical information</p>
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